

Renee, Book #3 (Part 1

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Summary: Hey, I'm still looking for series-title-suggestions, you know??? Anyway...read it...

Renee, Book #3 (Part 1

Chapter One

I ran as fast as I could through dark tunnels. They were chasing me.

I cast a fleeting glance over my shoulder. Yes. They were still behind me.

"You killed him!" the voices accused.

I saw my mother looming in front of me, anger and pain on her face. "You would kill another to save yourself," she said in a voice that broke my heart.

"To save Earth!" I cried.

"To save yourself," she repeated, then melted away into the mist.

"Mom! Don't go!" I pleaded.

"I have no part with a murderer!" her voice boomed.

"There she is!"

They were gaining on me again. I lengthened my stride and hastened my step.

"Renee!"

I could see him ahead of me. Blood stained his clothes. I shrank back in horror.

"You killed me, Renee," he said in an angry yet despairing tone. "You ruined my family."

"Your family was already ruined!" I protested. "They were Controllers! They're free now! You would have destroyed the hope of Earth. There was nothing I could do!"

"Catch her!"

I pushed past David, shoving him out of the way with my shoulder. My shoulder came away wet with blood.

"NO!" I cried in horror. "I..."

"You killed me!"

"Leave me alone!"

The crowd of pursuers gained too fast! Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder. He/she spun me around.

I was face to face with David's parents and the Animorphs.

"You killed our son!"

"She's ruining our group," Jake whispered to Marco, pointing at me.

"I promised I'd never trust again...why did I ever deter from that promise?" I cried to the mist enveloping me.

"Because you're too weak!" Rachel spat.

"You're a murderer!" Cassie said in an angry voice.

"So are you! You've taken the lives of so many Controllers that --"

~He was not even a Controller!~ Tobias insisted. ~You killed him!~

"We all voted. I alone was opposed to it! I killed him to save you!"

~You killed him,~ Aximili said, stepping forward. He pointed behind me and the group began to advance, pushing me back into the black haze.

Then, everyone in a chorus...

"We have no part with a murderer. We have no part with you, Renee the weak, Renee the murderer --"

I woke up in a cold sweat. The same nightmare I'd had for a week, ever since...

I had to do it! I had no control over the situation! He would have destroyed Earth!

I had no control over it!

I had lost control of my world... Chapter Two

The next day was Monday. Monday meant school.

I don't really enjoy school. I, like almost any other student, am bored. But that doesn't change the fact that I excel in school.

I'm a perfectionist, satisfied with nothing less than perfection. And in my world, perfection was fading.

They announced our averages that day. They were the "progress reports" -- not the grades that would go on the report card or anything.

It went okay until we got to science. Then they called my name and said, "Renee: 94."

I froze.

See, at that school where I went, a 95 and above was an A. A 94 to an 88 was a B.

I had a B+ average.

That's not a big deal to most people. I know it shouldn't be a big deal to me. But it was.

My world was spinning out of control. I couldn't even control my grades anymore.

"You killed me!"

I jerked my head up. No. Just words from my dream repeating themselves in my memory. That was all.

I shook my head as the bell rang. I couldn't really talk to anyone about my problems. Whenever I tried to talk to someone, they laughed.

My situations was laughable, in fact. No sane person freaks out because of a B+. Unless they happen to be a perfectionist.

The rest of the day passed in a blur. The bell announcing lunch rang finally and we all trudged toward the cafeteria.

Normally Cassie and Rachel and I sit together. The Animorphs, as a group, never do. But we were all known to be friends.

And we were, I realized. Despite a slight blow-up between Rachel and me over the whole David issue, we were friends. And neither of us had talked about David lately anyway.

I pulled out my single apple. I'd resolved to start eating less. In fact, I'd dumped out the rest of my lunch in the trash. I really didn't need the sandwich or the chips or the cookies. What was the point? My apple was fine.

"Hey, Renee, where's your lunch?" Rachel asked me.

I smiled defensively. "What, now there's a law on minimum food consumed at lunch?"

She laughed and shook her head. "No. But normally you have at least a drink."

"I have a diet soda," I said flatly.

She and Cassie exchanged looks. I could see Rachel looking askance at Cassie, who has a known reputation for understanding people. I, possessing a talent much the same, knew what she was looking for in my face.

I kept it blank.

Cassie changed the subject quickly, still searching my eyes. We chatted about boys (a.k.a., Jake, Tobias, and Aximili). I laughed at all the right times and made all the right comments.

I felt good when we ended lunch. A little hungry, yeah, but I was satisfied.

At least there was one area of my life that I could control.

Rachel sent me a casual look. "So, do you want to go shopping tonight? I'm thinking check out every store within a hundred miles, then maybe check out that new restaurant..."

Restaurant? No way. I didn't feel like blowing up like a blimp. And I knew that Rachel would talk me into sampling the desserts.

"I'm out," Cassie said with a shudder. "Dragging behind you for 'every store within a hundred miles' is not my idea of fun."

"Hey!" she protested. "Well, fine. Renee?"

I shifted uneasily. "No. I'm...busy...tonight."

"What are you doing?" she asked me.

"My foster parents and I have plans for supper," I said quickly. It was true. It was very true. The plans were that we'd eat. Even if I only had a diet soda or something light.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure," I said lightly. I looked at my half-eaten apple. "I'm full."

"You can't possibly be full," Cassie said in disbelief. "You've only taken like three bites, and you haven't even opened your soda."

"I'm full," I repeated. I tossed the rest of my apple into the trash.

I could hear Rachel and Cassie talking as I walked away. I lingered by the trash can for a moment, focusing on the sound of their voices.

"Do you think maybe she's..." Rachel asked in a low voice. I strained to hear.

"Anorexic?" Cassie said in an equally low voice. "Her? Renee? She didn't really seem that...hungry...that's all. I'm sure it's nothing more."

"Cassie, normally she packs as much of a lunch as we do. At the very least, she has a sandwich and some chips!"

Cassie shook her head. "I'm sure it's nothing, Rachel. Really." She stood up.

"Hey, I trust your judgment," Rachel admitted. "You're the psychiatrist here, not me."

I smiled to myself. Anorexic? Me? I just wasn't quite as hungry, that was all.

My stomach grumbled as I walked out the door.

I ignored it. Chapter Three

"The AMR is still out there," Jake said. "David may be gone, but it isn't."

I winced. I didn't like thinking about David.

"By the way, Renee, good job," Marco said sincerely.

I wanted to slap him. But I didn't. He didn't know how much that...incident...hurt me. I forced a "Yeah, thanks," out through my reluctant lips.

"Yeah, good job," Jake agreed. "I was beginning to think that you were --" He cut himself off suddenly. But I had seen the word forming on his lips.

Weak.

"Not good enough for you?" I finished with a challenging look. "Not good enough for you, oh mighty leader of the Animorphs? Not good enough to be in your little group? Was that what you were 'beginning to think'?"

"Renee, relax," Cassie said with an astonished look.

I swallowed a retort. I couldn't let anger get the better of me. I had to control it.

Control. Control.

Control my anger. Control my emotions. Control my grades. Control my eating habits.

Control. Control.

I relaxed, taking Cassie's thoughtful advice. I sloooowly sank back until I was leaning against the barn wall.

A barn cat leaped up onto a board near me. It purred slightly and butted its head against my arm. I relaxed further, stroking it gently. It purred loudly.

The other Animorphs immersed themselves in conversation, almost forgetting that I was there. Aximili sent me a worried look that I barely saw out of the corner of my eye. He sensed something. While in another Animorph I would have been bothered, when it was him seeing that something was wrong I was almost touched.

I just shrugged in response to his questioning look. I managed a small smile.

"What do you think about it, Renee?" Rachel asked me.

"About what?" I said listlessly.

"About the topic we've been discussing for the past fifteen minutes!" Jake said in exasperation.

"I wasn't listening," I said flatly. "Is that okay with you, oh master of the Animorphs?"

He flinched at the scornful tone that accompanied my words. I softened. "Sorry, Jake. I'm kind of tense today."

He nodded in acceptance. "Likewise. Well, obviously the AMR is on a Bug fighter, as opposed to in a lab or whatever like it was last time. We have to get on that Bug fighter."

~Actually, it was a Class One Arsenal ship,~ Ax informed us. ~They look much like Bug fighters, but are much larger and much more advanced technologically.~

Jake sighed. "Arsenal, Bug fighter, WHATEVER."

"Better to be correctly informed," I commented. "After all, we didn't see anything except the inside of it. It was cloaked."

~It dropped the cloak for an instant,~ Ax mentioned. ~I saw it as it left. It just flickered. It might be a power deficiency ---

"THAT'S IT!" Rachel yelled suddenly.

"Huh?" Marco said blankly.

"That has to be it! The way to bring down the Arsenal and the AMR!" she said excitedly.

"It would help if you filled us in," Cassie grumbled.

"Two words: power deficiency," she said with a grin.

_ Tobias muttered. _

_ "Why on Earth would the same ship housing the AMR have a power deficiency?" Rachel asked. "Maybe, just maybe, because the AMR was sapping their power too?" _

_ Aximili's stalk eyes swiveled towards her. ~They didn't use it -- but since it is on a ship, the level of power has to be maintained constantly. On the ground, it would be no problem. The error probably did not appear in the blueprint.~ _

_ "Cool!" Cassie exclaimed. "So, we get them to use the AMR, and it might possibly sap ALL the power? If they use it constantly?" _

_ "Um, are you blanking here?" Marco demanded. "What do you think will happen when he USES it, geniuses?" _

_ "The person in question will demorph," Rachel answered. "Unless, of course, we cheat." _

_ Our full attention was on her now. _

_ She smiled and turned to Aximili. "Is there any way that a metal object could be configured to attract all the power of the AMR?" _

_ He nodded as a human would. ~It's possible. If the Griegos principle were applied, it would be fairly easy.~ _

_ "Could you do it?" _

_ He considered. ~Probably.~ _

_ "Okay, then," she summarized. "Here's the deal: we all morph to birds and get ourselves captured. All of us wear a little strip of metal or something that absorbs the rays of the AMR. They'll fire it at least twice, using up a lot of power. From there, one of us, who has stayed hidden, will leap out, point the AMR away, and fire again and again. The feedback should destroy the AMR and the power supply."

_

_ "And then it crashes," Marco added. "With us in it." _

_ She shrugged. "Whoever sets off the AMR opens a hatch or something. The others will be birds." _

_ "What about the non-bird person?" Cassie pointed out. "They crash with the ship." _

_ "Not necessarily. They morph to bird immediately." _

_ ~I will do it,~ Aximili said quickly. ~I am the only one, other than Tobias, who could.~ _

_ "It's a toss-up between Ax and Tobias. And Ax volunteered," Jake agreed. "By the way, Rachel, nice plan." _

_ Everyone agreed, including me. Inside I felt like an idiot. _

_ I should have seen it! What was wrong with me? Was I totally blanking? Why couldn't I see what she had seen? _

_ Can't I succeed at anything? I wondered bitterly. _

_ "Okay, Ax, you're in," Jake said. "You morph with the rest of us, then demorph out of sight, then remorph after the power failure or whatever it is." _

_ ~Yes, Prince Jake.~ _

_ He smiled faintly. "Don't call me prince." _

_ ~Yes, Prince Jake.~ _

_ Marco sighed. "So how do we get ourselves caught?" _

_ ~How soon will the little metal things be ready?~ Tobias asked Aximili. _

_ ~In approximately two days.~ _

_ "Then we'll do it in six days," Jake decided. "Everyone take a rest. We've earned it. Meeting in five days to set it up or whatever. That's a Saturday." _

_ "Uh-huh," Marco said drily. "And on Sunday, we go get ourselves killed." _

_ Everyone looked at Rachel. _

_ "Let's do it!" Chapter Four _

_ Tuesday. I woke up from another night of screaming, idiotic, stupid, uncontrollable nightmares. _

_ It wasn't particularly enjoyable. _

_ In school, I felt tired, exhausted, and hungry. I hadn't gotten a halfway decent sleep. I hadn't eaten breakfast. All I'd had for supper the day before was an apple. _

_ But I did have to cut back. I didn't want to end up overweight, and this was an area of my life that I could control. There was nothing wrong with that. _

_ I finished an extra credit paper for science during study hall. I handed it in, hoping that with a few more I could bring my grade back up to an A. Plus, we had a test the next day. I'd have to ace it.

_

_ "Where's your lunch?" Rachel asked pointedly when the three of us sat down. _

_ I fought to control my emotions. That was another area that I needed to work on. I swallowed a sarcastic remark and replied coolly, "Perhaps it's in my lunch bag. Wouldn't that seem plausible?" _

_ "There's nothing in your lunch bag," she persisted. _

_ "Of course there is. I have some grapes." _

_ "And where are the chips and the sandwich and the soda?" she said in a slightly more anxious tone. I could hear worry in her voice.

_

_ I didn't care. _

_ "Obviously not in my lunch bag. If they were, the bag would be heavier." _

_ Rachel's face tensed with concern. "Renee..." _

_ "Yes, Rachel?" I said calmly. _

_ "If there's anything you need to talk about, we're here," she said softly. _

_ "Like what?" _

_ "Like the fact that you never eat anything anymore," Cassie said, getting into the slight conflict. _

_ I laughed lightly. "I had an apple and a diet soda yesterday, and today I have grapes. I'm eating plenty." _

_ "Okay, Renee, shut up for a minute," Rachel said in frustration. She leaned across the table. "On Friday you were normal. You had a normal lunch. You didn't have dark circles under your eyes. Then we had the stupid episode with David and suddenly you look like a zombie, you act like a zombie, and you are really starting to scare me, okay?" _

_ "Why?" I retorted. "Because the Yeerks might target me for the Sharing? Because it would endanger you?" _

_ "Because I care about you," she returned. "We all do. Everyone of us care about you. And if you're going anorexic on us --" _

_ I jerked away and pushed my chair away from the table. "Shut up, Rachel," I snapped. I clamped down on my emotions, calming myself. "Anorexic? Me? The battles must have messed up your brain, Xena. Leave me alone." _

_ I grabbed my lunch bag (which I hadn't opened) and stood. Cassie caught my arm. _

_ The cool, calm, nonchalant look was returning to my face. I was gaining control of myself again. No anger. No emotion. Calm. Yes. I let Cassie pull me back down. _

_ "Renee, listen to us," she pleaded. "We're your friends." _

_ "I'm aware of the fact," I said coldly. _

_ She tried to search my eyes with the special technique that she has. I kept my face carefully blank. _

_ "Look, Renee, we all have problems with this war," Rachel whispered, casting a cautious glance around her. "All of us have done things we don't want to think about." _

_ "That doesn't make it right," I whispered back, still with a disinterested look. _

_ "You're right. It doesn't," Cassie said. "But we have to do this. And you can't just freak out on us like this." _

_ "You don't have control of my actions," I said smoothly. "And I'm not anorexic. Get a grip. I'm...just...not...hungry," I said, enunciating clearly for the benefit of the obviously dim beings. "Now, are you going to keep acting like this? If so, I'll go find somewhere else to sit." _

_ Rachel and Cassie looked at each other uneasily. "Renee...just think about it, okay?" Rachel asked. _

_ I very deliberately slid my chair back. "Goodbye. I'll see you later." _

_ "Renee!" Rachel protested. _

_ I stood up and pushed my chair back in. "Goodbye," I repeated. On the way out I passed the trash can. _

_ I threw my uneaten lunch inside. Chapter Five _

_ I morphed to cheetah later and prowled around in the woods. I knew that a cheetah was out of place and I really didn't care. I didn't care about anything. _

_ As soon as I got out of my human form, I felt better. I was hungry, yes, but the cheetah's hunger was different. _

_ I took off, feeling energized and uplifted. The cheetah mind had come to rescue me. I was free. I was me. I was no longer the girl who Rachel and Cassie had seen. I was the old Renee, not a killer, not an Animorph. Just me. _

_ The girl who would have once loved to laugh. _

_ But then, that would have been going much further back than the Animorphs. I'd lost my love for laughter and jokes and humor long ago. I'd lost it before it developed. I'd lost it when a plane crashed and wrecked my life. _

_ Sure, I still got caught up in laughter and jokes and humor. Sometimes Rachel and I went shopping (or used to). I still laughed. I still joked. I still knew humor. _

_ Or, at least, my mask did. My mask was artful. It could assume any emotion, hide any emotion. I'd spent my whole life developing it, after all. Sometimes I forgot that it was not a mask, until I remembered. _

_ Come back, Mom, I cried silently. _

_ The cheetah brain took over and caught me up in its wild rush. It was me. It was what I would have been. _

_ Would have been. Would have been. _

_ I hadn't lost anything. I'd simply never gained anything. _

_ I lengthened my stride. The cheetah seemed to emanate energy. It was energy. It was filled with energy. _

_ I ran, forgetting everything. I forgot about Rachel and Cassie and

all the others, even Aximili. The cheetah cared for none of them.

_

_ I was a loner. I always had been. It was why I had sworn never to trust anyone. _

_ But I had trusted them, hadn't I? Why? Why had I done that? Was it because I felt drawn to them? Was it because I felt like I belonged with them? _

_ I belonged with a group of murderers? _

_ What, did you forget, Renee? I asked myself. You're one of them now, in more ways than one. _

_ I ran faster. The cheetah mind swallowed the human mind up. The human still tried to force its gloomy thoughts upon me, but it failed. I ignored it. _

_ But I was the human, wasn't I? _

_ No. I was the cheetah. I was running. _

_ I was the human, not the cheetah. I was the cheetah, not the human.

_

_ Suddenly I realized what was happening. I was losing it. The emotional strain was wearing me down. My brain was too emotionally weak to function. _

_ No, that couldn't be! I needed it! I needed that brain to save me from my heart. I needed the mask, the brain, the facade that I had become. I needed them! _

_ I pushed the cheetah out of the way and slowed. _

_ No, no. I am not a cheetah. I am a human. Can't let it control me. Can't... _

_ Mom, come back. Dad? Are either of you there? Do either of you hear me? _

_ Of course not. They're dead! Renee, wake up! You're alone! You always have been! _

_ Run. Run. Prey. Find prey. Run. _

_ I'm a murderer? That can't be! It isn't! I couldn't help it! _

_ Couldn't control it, Renee? Is that your problem? Are you too weak to control yourself? _

_ I had no choice! _

_ There's always a choice! _

_ Find prey! Run! Faster, faster! _

_ I dodged back suddenly. I hadn't even realized that I was running, once again. The stupid cheetah mind had taken over! _

_ What was with me? _

_ I had to demorph. Had to get out of the form! This wasn't me! This wasn't my body! _

_ Demorph. Demorph. _

_ RUN! Faster! Faster! _

_ My mind was snapping. I was losing it. The strain... _

_ I focused sharply, forcing my brain back into action. I focused on me, the real me, the me that I was. _

_ Dark-blond hair. Hazel eyes. Tall. Too tall? It didn't matter. _

_ I resumed my human form. I was okay. I was me. _

_ The cheetah was me! _

_ The logical part of my brain overtook the stupid, irrational part that was surfacing. No. I was not an energized, hyperactive creature. I was a sentient human. I was Renee, and I was going to succeed. I was going to meet my goals. _

_ Where did that come in? I wondered. Didn't matter. My logical brain had brought me back to the present and it was reminding me that...what else?...I had homework. _

_ I turned and began the walk home. Barefoot. _

_ Some things never change. _

_ I left the emotional part of me buried deep inside. I could not allow it to surface. I could not allow it to take over as it had today. Never again. NEVER again. I could not allow anything to undermine me like that, not even myself. _

_ I had to control it. _

_ Just like I had to control everything else in my world. _

_ Deep inside my mind I began to wonder what the difference was between my "rational, logical brain" and a Yeerk. _

_ The emotional part of me wondered what the difference was between the rest of me and a host. _

_ The rest of me wondered why I was out in the woods without shoes. _

_ Maybe I was losing it. _

_ _

End
file.